

Book Review

**State and Society in
Syria and Lebanon**

Edited by Youssef M. Choueiri, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, xviii + 129pp.

The aim of this book, as pointed out in the introduction, is to explore the unfolding and evolving of "state institutions, socioeconomic structures, cultural policies and ideological currents" from the end of

the Ottoman Empire until the present in Syria and Lebanon. Although laudable, the book falls short of this lofty aim, for the arguments presented in several essays are not developed fully while others contain a great deal of rhetoric. Nonetheless, some articles deserve the readers' close attention.

The first article is by Abdul-Karim Rafeq, a prominent Syrian historian, who challenges from the outset the notion that Arab nationalism appeared in the nineteenth century due to the European impact. In a highly nuanced argument, he traces the development of identity among the Syrian ulama under Ottoman rule through their defence of the "rightful application of the Islamic Shari'ah [which they] were highly critical of any breaches of it" (p. 2). Moreover, he adds that they sided with the peasantry against the unjust application of Ottoman land grants, which reduced the peasants to little more than serfs. His initial arguments are both well researched and highly documented. After a short discussion of the tolerance that existed between the Syrian Christians and the Muslim rulers, Rafeq turns his attention to Amīr Fayṣal's attempt to establish an Arab government in post-Ottoman Syria.

In one speech, Fayṣal described the aim of the Arab Revolt as being to "preserve a portion of the Ottoman Empire and shield it from the fate destined to befall Turkey following the war" (p. 5). Rafeq was trying to show that Fayṣal, as a Muslim, had a common identity with the Ottoman Muslims and to refute the notion that his father was a traitor to the Muslim world. Although Fayṣal envisioned the Arab lands as indivisible, he acknowledged that there were differences among them that stood in the way of establishing a single Arab nation (p. 5). Rafeq shows that while Syria's Arab nationalist leadership sought independence from the Hijāz, it also sought to remain tied to it through economic and educational bonds.

In a very subtle fashion, Rafeq is illustrating that Arabs within the Ottoman Empire had varying degrees of identity salience. The nationalist leadership's (in Damascus) intense identification with Syria (Greater Syria in this case) did not negate its identification with the Arabs in the Hijāz or their identity as Muslims within the Muslim world, of which the Ottoman leadership was a part. In fact, he shows brilliantly how Fayṣal's identity with the Turks was a factor in his attempts to contain the French onslaught on Syria (pp. 9-11). The author also demonstrates that Fayṣal's support came from the intellectuals known as al Jabhah al Sha'bīyah, and that his opponents consisted of the "old notables," who perceived him and the nationalists as dangerous (pp. 12-13).

From Fayṣal and the notables, Rafeq turns his attention to the peasantry. He shows that they had an identity salience with their homeland and engaged in jihad to defend it against foreigners. The fact that the revolts were dominated by notables constrained them from becoming

revolts of a social and economic nature (p. 19). Rafeq shows that the various groups in Syria during Fayṣal's short reign had several identities as a result of centuries-long patterns of social and economic behavior.

Wajih Kawtharani, using French archival documents, offers an in-depth analysis and exposition of French plans to prevent the advent of Greater Syria. In his analysis of the Millerand plan, he reveals that Syria was to be divided into a region for the Turks and the Kurds, another for Arab tribes (the bedouins), Lebanon, and a further eight autonomous regions (including Aleppo, Hama, and Tripoli) that would include the Druze and the Sunni Muslims. These eight autonomous groups would be united by a confederation (pp. 48-51). Kawtharani's article is well-researched and well-documented.

In another article, Sofia Saadeh continues the discussion of the division within Greater Syria by focusing on Lebanon's Sunnis and Maronites. She challenges such conventional explanations of the Lebanese political system as presented by the Marxist approach, Khomeini's approach of the "mighty" and the "deprived," and those who claim that it is a sectarian system. She suggests that the Lebanese system should be examined as a caste system, because it is the communities and not the individuals that are ranked. Moreover, the individual is born into the caste and remains there throughout his/her life. Mobility is possible within the caste, but not among castes (pp. 66-67). Evidence for such analysis is a reinterpretation of the National Pact of 1943, which cast the Maronites as the upper caste and awarded them the presidency, while the Sunni Moslems were awarded the second caste and the premiership (p. 71). A more poignant point is seen in her depiction of the House of Representatives as a parliament of castes in which, to maintain Christian control, Armenians and Christian Palestinians received citizenship while the Kurds and Muslim Palestinians did not (pp. 71-72). Although this is a well-argued article, Saadeh could have used more evidence to further substantiate her analytical framework.

Ghayth Armanazi offers a description of Syria's foreign policy after the second Gulf War. According to him, Syria is seeking to find a broader balance to counter Israel's military superiority (p. 117). The article suggests that Syria's participation in the second Gulf War was a calculated move on Asad's part that reflects his attempts to take advantage of opportunities while trying to reduce perceived threats. The analysis, however, does not offer any new insights into Syrian foreign policy behavior.

Finally, Al-Fadl Shalaq's attempt to explain the Lebanese Sunnis' notion of nation and state is full of rhetoric in response to the collapsing Arab order and the defeat of the Arab nationalists' secular vision. Shalaq relies on borrowed Islamist rhetoric to make his points, one among them being "[t]he umma will lead to unity, and unity will lead

to statehood. The existence of the umma, however, does not depend on the realization of either unity or statehood; it is the umma which is the indispensable condition for all else" (p. 126). Unfortunately, Arab nationalism will need much more than rhetoric to reclaim the political arena.

Although this book attempted to fill a gap in the literature, one is left wishing for more critical discussion of the issues that it claimed to analyze.

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